

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BERLIN 7152

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CGEN, GE

SUBJ: JEWISH CLAIMS AGAINST THE GDR

REF: STATE 279371

1. BENJAMIN FERENCZ OF THE CONFERENCE ON JEWISH MATERIAL CLAIMS MET NOVEMBER 22 WITH OTTO FUNKE, CHAIRMAN OF THE GDR COMMITTEE OF ANTI-FASCIST RESISTANCE FIGHTERS, AND TWO COLLEAGUES (HELMER AND FRIEDMANN), WITH FUNKE READING TO HIM THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT: (UNOFFICIAL TRANSLATION) THE COMMITTEE OF ANTI-FASCIST RESISTANCE FIGHTERS, PROMPTED BY HUMANITARIAN CONSIDERATIONS, HAS DECIDED TO GRANT ON A ONE-TIME BASIS AN AMOUNT OF \$1 MILLION FOR THE SUPPORT OF JEWISH CITIZENS OF THE US WHO WERE PERSECUTED BY THE NAZI REGIME. THIS SUM WILL BE PLACED AT THE DISPOSAL OF THE CONFERENCE ON JEWISH MATERIAL CLAIMS AGAINST GERMANY. THE CONFERENCE WILL CONSIDER WHICH NEEDY AMERICANS OF THE JEWISH FAITH WHO WERE PERSECUTED BY THE NAZI REGIME SHOULD RECEIVE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FROM THIS CONTRIBUTION. (END TRANSLATION)

2. FERENCZ SAID THERE WAS NO FLEXIBILITY IN THE GDR POSITION, THAT FUNKE ADOPTED IN EFFECT A TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT ATTITUDE, AND SOUGHT TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT THE GDR CONSIDERED THE MATTER CLOSED AS A RESULT

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OF THE OFFER. FERENCZ SAID HE HAD THE IMPRESSION THAT

IF THE GDR HAD KNOWN THE BANK ACCOUNT NUMBER OF THE CONFERENCE, THEY WOULD DEPOSIT THE ONE MILLION DOLLARS IN THE ACCOUNT. FERENCZ SAID HE THANKED FUNKE AND INDICATED THAT HE WOULD HAVE TO DISCUSS THE MATTER WITH HIS COLLEAGUES FROM THE CONFERENCE ON JEWISH MATERIAL CLAIMS.

3. IN DISCUSSING MATTER WITH CHARGE, FERENCZ SAID THE CONFERENCE COULD: A) ACCEPT THE OFFER; B) REJECT THE OFFER, OR C) ACCEPT THE OFFER AS A HUMANITARIAN GESTURE BUT AT THE SAME TIME MAKE IT PLAIN TO THE EAST GERMANS (AND THE USG) THAT THE CONFERENCE STILL CONSIDERED THE MATTER OF JEWISH CLAIMS AN OPEN ONE. FERENCZ SAID HE WAS INCLINED TO THE LATTER VIEW. FERENCZ ASKED OUR VIEW OF THE THIRD ALTERNATIVE AND WE RESPONDED THAT, WHILE WE WERE NOT LAWYERS, WE WOULD ASSUME THAT ACCEPTANCE OF THE OFFER WOULD BE TAKEN BY THE EAST GERMANS AS AN INDICATION THAT THE MATTER WAS CLOSED.

4. FERENCZ RETURNED TO THE EMBASSY LATE AFTERNOON NOVEMBER 23 TO REPORT ON HIS TELEPHONE CALL WITH NAHUM GOLDMANN NOVEMBER 22 AND SUBSEQUENT DISCUSSION NOVEMBER 23 WITH HELMER, SINCE FUNKE WAS NOT AVAILABLE. FERENCZ SAID GOLDMANN WAS AGAINST ACCEPTING THE OFFER, PARTICULARLY IF THE MONEY WAS ONLY FOR US JEWS. IF THE GDR SHOULD DEPOSIT THE MONEY IN THE CONFERENCE'S ACCOUNT (THE NUMBER OF WHICH THE EAST GERMANS NOW HAVE), HE WOULD BE INCLINED TO SEND IT BACK. IT WAS DECIDED CONFERENCE MEMBERS WOULD MEET IN JANUARY TO DISCUSS THE ISSUE. IN HIS MEETING NOVEMBER 23 WITH HELMER, FERENCZ TOLD HIM TO HOLD THE MONEY, NOT TO DEPOSIT IT, AND IN EFFECT TO WAIT UNTIL THE CONFERENCE COULD REPLY. FERENCZ HOPES HE PERSUADED THE EAST GERMANS TO HOLD OFF, IN ORDER NOT TO COMPLICATE THE SITUATION.

5. NEUES DEUTSCHLAND NOVEMBER 23 CARRIED A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE MEETING BETWEEN FERENCZ AND FUNKE WITHOUT, HOWEVER, MENTIONING THE SUM OF MONEY INVOLVED. GETLER OF WASHINGTON POST AND ERB OF AP HAVE BEEN PHONING PAO
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LAST TWO DAYS LOOKING FOR DETAILS OF FERENCZ TALKS. GETLER REPORTS BEING UNDER PRESSURE FROM HIS HOME OFFICE WHICH VIEWS STORY AS MAJOR NEWS. UNTIL NOW, PAO HAS SIMPLY CONFIRMED TALKS TAKING PLACE, BUT AFTER CONSULTATION WITH CHARGE AND FERENCZ LATE NOVEMBER 23, HE PLANS, ON IF-ASKED-BASIS, CONFIRM THAT GDR INDICATED IT WISHES MAKE ONE-TIME PAYMENT TO NEEDY VICTIMS OF NAZI PERSECUTION, BUT THAT AMOUNT IS MATTER BETWEEN

CLAIMS CONFERENCE AND ANTI-FASCIST COMMITTEE. GETLER AND ERB BOTH UNDERSTAND RELATIVELY PRIVATE NATURE OF TALKS AND THAT THEREFORE EMBASSY COMMENT WILL NOT BE FORTH-COMING, BUT HAVE PLEADED FOR BACKGROUND INFORMATION. CONSEQUENTLY, WE WILL PROVIDE SOME BACKGROUND ON ORGANIZATION AND ORIGIN OF CLAIMS CONFERENCE, THE INVITATION FROM GDR, SOME BIOGRAPHIC MATERIAL ON FERENCZ, AND REFER PRESS TO CONGRESSIONAL RECORD ON CLAIMS LEGISLATION FOR FURTHER MATERIAL. WE WOULD ALSO NOTE THAT QUESTION OF CLAIMS NEGOTIATIONS, INCLUDING VICTIMS OF NAZISM, WAS POINT AGREED IN MINUTE ON ESTABLISHMENT OF RELATIONS. POLANSKY

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